2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

windy days my favourite tree would bend and sway with incredible grace: it reminded me of some frail craft riding a stormy sea.

When we first arrived the hillsides were covered with yellow daphne, the bark of which is used to make paper. There were also a number of flowering apricots, orange trees, and ferns of every description, including the huge umbrella-like tree-fern, the pith of which can be made into spirit. Rather strangely, for Sikkim is famous for its flora, we found no flowers, but the undergrowth was thick with wormwood, which saturated the air with its pleasantly bitter scent.

According to the Lepcha dictionary the word Lingtem means "a mixture of slope and level: to be out of the perpendicular, to incline, to have leaning outwards." The place is all of these, except that the amount of level ground is negligible; and it was not possible to go more than a hundred yards or so in any direction without going either steeply up or down hill. The lowest and highest houses in the village were not more than a mile apart; but to go from one to the other involved a climb of well over fifteen hundred feet.

There were altogether thirty-three houses in Lingtem, and a total population of one hundred and seventy-nine souls. These thirty-three houses were spread about over several square miles of country, and in no particular spot were more than three or four grouped together. The grouping was entirely haphazard and in no way based upon relationships: a man might be at one end of the village, his brother a mile away. There was no attempt at planning; the village had just grown up like this. Additional houses would be built on any suitable site: the proximity of relations was of less importance than the selection of a spot that was free from evil influences. The monastery was situated in roughly the centre. In addition to its ordinary function as a place of worship, it served also as a village club. Twice every month there would be religious festivals, when anything up to

101 192 tion to the word 'Mother' is interesting, because customs are to be found amongst the Lepchas which appear to be vestiges of the primitive-social institution of Matriarchy or the mother-ship of clans; whilst this institution still flourishes amongst their co-related tribes in the neighbouring Garo-hills, who trace their descent through their mothers and not 192 through their fathers. Thus, as apparent vestiges of matriarchy amongst the Lepchas, I 581 find still surviving the usage of female suitorship, in which the young woman proposes marriage by offering to the man selected a basket of eggs; personal inclination in the choice of a husband; monogamy as a rule only relaxed in case the wife proves barren, [581] tribal endogamy, avoidance of girl's mother, and not unfrequent Teknonymy whereby the father is called after his child — thus the father of Tak-li-ap (*Tak-li-ap bo*). Moreover all ●103 the tribal groups (*a-git*), of which there are several scores, bear the affix 'mother' 192 (*mo*) [1]), although the proper name in this group title is territorial, the name of a particular valley or glen or hillside; and their grouping is itself merely territorial and has no significance as to marriage or true tribal division. Instances of such groups are 'The Wormwood mother' (*Tak-ñel-mo*), for the locality of this hamlet is exceptionally overgrown with wormwood; 'The Foot mother' (*Sang-dyang-mo*): this hamlet is one of the very few which lies at the *foot* of the tropical forge of the Tista-river; 'the Stockade mother' (*Tung-sung-mo*) this village near Darjiling occupies the site of an old stockade; 'the sloping-field mother' (*Ling-tam-mo*), 'the Namchi mother' (*Nam tsii-mo*), and thus we also have 'the Darjiling mother' for those born at Darjiling (*Darjeling-mo*). The only group of the tribe, 101 it may be added, which does not bear this affix of 'mother' is the highest section or 192 *A-den-pan-tso* [2]) from which, as its name denotes, the kings (*Pano*) and the ministers (*A-den*) used to be drawn — now however its members have a preponderating strain of Tibetan blood.

192 As instances of others of these archaic words and phrases whose meanings have been forgotten by the Lepchas, but which seem to me to be apparently of a descriptive character, may be cited the words and phrases qualifying 'fields' and 'world', namely '*Ku-ran-mik*' and '*zor*'. In the former the words literally read 'bosom-stone-below', which would read 'the fields on the bosom of stone underneath.' The prefix *Ku* also is used for 'clothes', with the same meaning as Tibetan '*gō*', (gos) a coat, and *gur*, a tent, in either case would give the sense of 'the fields clothing the bosom of the stones'. Whilst the word joined to 'world' means 'rain' (*zo* or *so*, which is literally applicated to the Lepcha part of the world as it is one of the rainiest sites on the globe; but probably it also meant originally the rain of the eyes or *tears*, and was perhaps thus used by the weary toiling Lepcha in the pessimistic sense of 'tearful world'.

[194] The homonymic character of the language also, would suggest the possibility that some of these archaic words are descriptive as in the tonic Chinese and Burmese, such as 'the *flat-thing* plate', 'the *round-thing* bottle' etc. It is to be hoped that this interesting question will be pursued by philologists.

776 The spirits and deities of the tribe are referred to in these songs, and require a little description, as they show the primitive conception of the Lepchas in regard to God, and the deification of natural objects and of their ancestors. The Lepcha gods and godlings are

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[1]) Not *Mung* as stated by Mr. Risley (loc. cit. IV. Appendix 88); this word means 'devil'.
[2]) The affix *tso* is interpreted as 'stock or lineage'.

CHAPTER III

THE MOUNTAIN TRIBES OF SIKKIM

A. The Lepchas

The Lapches or Lepchas are supposed to be the original inhabitants of Sikkim. They call themselves Rong; the Tibetans call them Mon, and the Bhutanese, Meri. The Mongoloid problem can best be studied through the Lepchas of the Southern Himalayas and hence they are dealt with more thoroughly.

According to one opinion the Lepchas are supposed to have come not from Tibet, but from the east of the mountains from Assam and Upper Burma.[22] Their own tradition, however, states that their original home was in the neighbourhood of the great mountain, Kang-chen-mdzod-lnga[23] the second highest mountain in the world. That is the Tibetan name and means the "Great Glacier of the Five Store-rooms." The Lepcha name for the mountain is, "King-tzum-song-bu." King-tzum means "Highest part of the forehead," song-bu means "the highest." Literally it means, "the highest over our head." This Lepcha name is reproduced phonetically by the Tibetans as "Kang-chen-mdzod-lnga," which has quite a different meaning. This snow-covered mountain has an important part to play as the habitat of the spirits. King-tzum-rum is the god of happiness; Rum-king-tzum is the god of fate.[24] From it the Lepchas derive the name Rong, by which they are known. Rong means "peak" or "mountain peak" and has the same significance as the word Arong.

Another tradition has it that the place of their origin is on the holy mountain Kailasa (Ti se) way up in Tibet. On the mountain is the stone Ne-long which bears the footprints of Buddha and of animals. The god, Pum-rum, protector of the hunters, lives there. Pum-rum is also another name for the Supreme God of the Lepchas as we shall soon see. The

22. J. C. White, Sikkim and Bhutan, London, 1909, p. 7.
23. Kangchenjunga, Fig. 17 & 18.
24. G. B. Mainwaring and A. Grünwedel, Dictionary of the Lepcha Language, Berlin 1898, 17a, 356 b.

[p. 29]